



Momentum13 – 17-20 October 2013, Hallstatt (Austria)

Track #10 “Europe – Towards Progress?”

The European Union has been a contested project ever since its creation. Already in the 1950s and 1960s, neoliberal and conservative intellectuals perceived European political and economic integration as instrument against state interference in the economy, as well as bulwark against the soviet bloc and de-colonisation movements.¹ At the same time, for many resistance fighters European integration was to be a guarantee for peaceful, social and democratic development in Europe.²

Since the mid-1980s, the struggle over the nature of the European project seems to have been decided: An alliance of transnational corporations and capitalist associations, together with neoliberal public actors like the European Commission and the national finance and economic ministries, has successfully anchored competitiveness as main mode of integration. Through projects such as the Internal Market and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), central areas of economic policy-making have been relocated to the European level – yet without fundamental democratization, and without the concomitant articulation of a social and transfer union.

This is not simply a construction mistake, as many observers have recently argued, but rather the result of specific strategies: that is, to increasingly isolate neoliberal economic policy from political consensus and democratic requirements. The spatial shift of policy fields to the European level here served to circumvent political compromise structures at the national level, terrains on which trade unions, social movements and emancipatory/progressive parties still had room for manoeuvre.

The current crisis of the European Union intensifies these tendencies. To push forward a radicalized version of the status quo, accelerated de-democratisation and increasing coercion are now supposed to compensate for the breaking-up of the remnants of popular consensus for the neoliberal mode of integration.

This is rendered particularly visible through the austerity politics the European ensemble of state apparatuses has imposed at the level of the Member States in crisis: the dismantling of collective bargaining systems, privatization of public and municipal services, continuous increase of the retirement age to life expectancy, extension of the working week and the cancellation of additional salary payments. Instruments such as economic governance (the so-called six-pack), the fiscal

¹Hallstein, *Wirtschaftliche Integration als Faktor politischer Einigung*, in Greiß (Hg.), *Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Kultur*. FS Alfred Müller-Armack (1961) 267

² See for instance the Ventotene Manifesto, authored by Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni while in prison under Italian fascism; or Willy Brandt’s statement in the Swedish newspaper ‘Trots allt’ in August 1943: ‘The day will come when the hatred that seems unavoidable in war will be overcome. One day the Europe in which Europeans can live must become a reality.’

compact and the competitiveness pact are to ensure that these measures, developed in southern European laboratories, are now enacted across the European Union.

This austerity politics cannot be democratically sanctioned – crisis measures are increasingly unconstitutional and in conflict with EU law, and are discussed and implemented by circumventing democratic procedures. The expansion of security and surveillance structures then serves to insulate these processes against the contestation and resistance of the people of Europe.

In this constellation, reactionary and chauvinistic discourses and social forces are on the rise. A tough political line against ‘lazy Southerners’, migrants and ‘Brussels bureaucrats’ constitutes a means to mobilise popular consensus, all the while obscuring the fundamental social questions raised by the crisis. This guarantees that the social power relations within the European project remain essentially intact.

And yet social struggles and resistance against austerity seem to be increasing. Under the call for ‘Real Democracy Now!’ more and more people in Europe reject the neoliberal mantra that there is no alternative to structural reforms and limited, market-conforming democracy. Initiatives like the first pan-European general strike in November 2012 show that there are attempts to transnationalise resistance. Demands for a ‘Europe from below’ and a ‘Constituent Assembly for a new Europe’ are engendered by the conviction that alternatives can only be achieved through a fundamental shift in power relations also on the European terrain. The struggles over the question whether Europe is (or could be) a progress hence seem to be more pertinent than ever.

In contrast to the omnipresent ‘speed-kills-rhetoric’ that seeks to postpone all fundamental discussion until ‘after the crisis’, we insist that it is high time to engage with these core questions:

- What is left of the promises of a united Europe?
- Who has benefitted from the integration processes until now – and at whose costs?
- Who are the central actors in European politics? Which social forces have had an impact on European (crisis) politics? Which structural advantages and disadvantages (e.g. along social, gendered and ethnic dimensions) are at play in these processes? Which resources do these actors have?
- Is the main line of conflict indeed (still) between the EU and the Member States, or rather increasingly located between the European and national state apparatuses on the one hand, and representative democracy and fundamental social and political rights on the other?
- How can we explain the increasingly authoritarian tendencies at the institutional level that concentrate ever more power in the hands of ever fewer actors?
- Which concrete alternatives are there, and how feasible are they?
- Despite the demand for a social and democratic Europe having been a core demand of trade unions and emancipatory parties for decades, little has actually materialized in this direction. How can we explain this?
- Which concrete power relations, and which political and legal structures constitute obstacles to a democratic and social Europe?

About Momentum

The annual 'Momentum' conference is dedicated to the integration of academic knowledge and political practice and invites contributions from researchers, trade unionists, political practitioners and activists. Momentum is interdisciplinary, particularly open to submissions from young scholars and decidedly invites not only academic but also policy-oriented papers.

The 2013 overall conference theme is 'progress', with ten thematically distinct tracks (for an overview see [here](#)). The Momentum conference series has been launched in 2008 and is generally held in German. [Track #10 "Europe – A Progress"](#) is held in English – all paper contributions and discussions will be in English.

Track #10 coordinators:

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Practical information

Momentum13 takes place 17-20 October 2013 in Hallstatt (Austria). We welcome submissions of abstracts (max two A4 pages), **the deadline for submissions of Track #10 is 15 May 2013**. Abstracts should be submitted to anmeldung@momentum-kongress.org, including name and contact information. The conference papers should then be available by 7 September 2013.

More information on the location, accommodation, conference fee (and discounts) [is available on the conference website](#). The track coordinators would be happy to assist non-German speakers with practical issues. Please feel free to contact Lukas Oberndorfer (lukas.oberndorfer@univie.ac.at) and/or Laura Horn (lhorn@ruc.dk) if you have any questions about the content and format of the conference track.